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THE INTEGRITY OF THE INTELLECT

RALPH BARTON PERRY

HARVARD UNIVERSITY

It is characteristic of today that the intellect should require such humble allegiance as that which I offer in this lame and halting discourse.

“But yesterday the word of Reason might
Have stood against the world; now lies it there,
And none so poor to do it reverence.”

Among the ancients reason was enthroned as “the ruling faculty” of man, and the essential attribute of God. The greatest of the Christian philosophers, St. Augustine and St. Thomas, were its devotees. The seventeenth-century revolt against mediævalism was conducted in its name. In the eighteenth century, to be sure, reason, in the narrower sense, fell off somewhat in prestige; there was less confidence in the method of logic and mathematics. But this was offset by a heightened confidence in man’s powers of observation, so that the intellectual or cognitive faculties as a whole were greatly increased both in authority and in the extent of their dominion.

Since the eighteenth century the intellect has rapidly declined, until today it actually needs friends. Even those who have nominally acted as its friends have contributed to its downfall. I mean those who, like the Hegelians, have inducted reason into a sort of mock kingship, a sort of British monarchy over the empire of being. For by asserting that the real is the rational, by insisting upon having the sun rise and set in the name of reason, these thinkers have reduced reason to a mere symbol, a mere cloak of respectability, in which reality, such as it is, may still be venerated. From other quarters have come rougher if less fatal blows. Modern psychology, speaking for emotion

and instinct, has reduced intellect to impotence over life. Metaphysics has subordinated it to will. Bergson and his followers have charged it with falsehood and issued a general warning against its misrepresentations; while with pragmatists and instrumentalists it is sunk so low that it is dressed in livery and sent to live in the servants' quarters. It is against this last indignity in particular that I wish to speak a word of protest, to the end that the intellect may be accorded full rights within the community of human activities and interests.

Since doctors disagree, we must leave open the question as to whether the war was the result of too much intellect or too little. Dr. Hobhouse of England felt the pulse of suffering humanity, and issued the statement that the war was the result of the recent neglect of the intellect, the result of too much "will to live," too much "*élan vital*," too much of the "it's-true-if-it-works" sort of philosophy. He recommended a quiet life and as much logic as the system could assimilate. But Dr. Boutroux of France made a very different diagnosis, in fact quite the opposite. He said that humanity was suffering from too much science and too little feeling, especially in its Prussian parts; and he prescribed sentiment and milk of human kindness. So we may for the present pass the application by, and content ourselves with discussing the following question in general terms: Is the intellect to be regarded as autonomous and self-sufficient, as pursuing ends of its own, and as judging by standards of its own? or is it to be regarded as the servant of alien interests which impose their ends and standards upon it?

The modern tendency has been towards the latter or practical interpretation of the knowing faculties. This tendency appears to be divisible into four main phases. First, there is the rise of experimentalism in scientific method. The science of the seventeenth century, reflected in Cartesianism, was confident of the power of the rea-

soning processes to reach indubitable certainties. In the next century, however, experimentalism gradually superseded scientific rationalism, affecting first the empirical sciences, then the pure sciences, and finally, in our own day, even mathematics itself. Experiment rests on hypothesis-making, which is evidently a voluntary operation, a case of trial and error, of success or failure. The results of experiment are subject to correction, and can never be indubitably certain; and yet there must be results, such as they are, because man needs them to live by. Thus practical need, rather than logical necessity, reveals itself as the master motive of science. Second, there is the growth of applied science, the increased interest in the control and reconstruction of nature, accompanied by a decline in the practice of meditation or the vocation of the intellectual life. Third, there is the voluntaristic metaphysics, in which the act or impulse of thought is construed as more real than the ideas, its passive states. Or it is argued that the will to think at all, and the willingness to acknowledge reasons, are deeper than the particular reasons for thinking this idea rather than that. Finally, there is the growing influence of biology and the application of biological principles to the human faculties, thought among the rest. Man is said to have brains because they enable him to survive. Intelligence is construed as an organic function, and reason as developed or evolved intelligence.

Among these influences tending to subordinate the intellect there is only one that can be regarded as fundamentally questionable or likely to be reversed in the light of further investigation; and that is the voluntaristic metaphysics. The rest are influences that in a broad sense have come to stay. We cannot expect to see any decline of experimentalism in science, or in the scope and influence of applied science, nor any abandonment of the view that man and his faculties belong to the field of the biological

sciences and are therefore subject to the methods and laws which are proper to that field. In what follows I shall therefore regard these ideas as prescribing terms on which the status of the intellect must be defined. In particular, I shall cordially accept the biological view of the intellect; partly because I believe such a view to be ultimately and philosophically sound; partly because it is in any case acceptable in the limited scientific sense, so that we may, if we wish, waive these ultimate philosophical considerations and still reach conclusions that are in some sense true. In the biological view of the intellect I find nothing derogatory to that faculty; but on the contrary I find a justification even for the most extravagant claims that have been made in its behalf. Let me state what I find, first in general terms, and then with more circumstance and detail.

If we speak of the intellect as an organ in the biological sense, we mean the central nervous system in its cognitive rather than its motor and affective functions. Now this intellectual organ, like any organ, has its office or rôle in the life of the organism as a whole. As it depends on the nutritive, circulatory, and respiratory organs, so these in turn depend on it. It obtains its share of good only by virtue of contributing its share of service. We are taught by biology to believe that the organism carries no passengers, but only members of the crew, each with an allotted part in keeping the ship afloat and bringing it to port. Let me mention some of these duties of the intellect so that we may have them clearly before our minds. Through its sensory mechanisms the intellect enables the organism to time its responses, to keep in touch with occurrences in the environment, and to act opportunely. Through memory and association the intellect enables the organism to profit by the successes and failures of the past, and to learn better. Through the mechanisms of language and ideation the intellect enables the organism to extend the range and

freedom of its behavior by responding to situations distant in space and time, and by initiating action in the absence of an immediately exciting cause. Through its power of discrimination the intellect enables the organism to deal with those more abstract relations of things which are identical, persistent, and recurrent; and so to acquire a kind of concentrated adaptation and equipment — one that is suited to the multiple and varied emergencies of life while being at the same time light enough to carry. Finally, through the integrative action of the nervous system the organism is enabled to adjust its responses among themselves, and thus to proceed smoothly and consistently toward the execution of larger plans and purposes. These are some of the services which the intellect renders to the organism to which it belongs, and by which it earns its passage. Intellection is in this sense on a par with breathing and fighting and food-getting. Like these other functions it may be said to succeed or to fail according as it does or does not accomplish the specific task assigned to it.

Shall we then say that the proof of the intellect is in the living? that a healthy life argues a healthy intellect? that good thinking is whatever works? or that sound knowledge is whatever stands the test of time — whatever is accepted by the surviving minds that have sustained the struggle for existence?

What should we say if a physiologist were to assert that sound digestion is digestion that works, digestion that causes health, long life, and survival? I think we should be bored. It is an obvious, loose, and irrelevant view of the matter. Suppose an expert in military science were asked to define the standards and criteria of good generalship, and he should say, "A good general is one who wins battles." This might do as a *bon mot*, or as a confession of inability to provide an adequate definition; but in any case it evidently evades the issue by means of a

doubtfully true truism — doubtfully true because it is always possible in special circumstances that a good general should lose a battle, or a man with a good digestion find an early grave. In other words, what is called for is the specification of that particular state or activity which is peculiar to good digestion, or to good generalship, *as such*; the distinctive attainment by virtue of which digestion may contribute to health, or generalship to military success. Each of these functions has a success of its own to achieve, by which alone it is a factor in the success of the more general enterprise in which it participates. And this proper, distinctive success is to be judged by its own proper, distinctive standard.

Now let us apply this to the case of the intellect. This organ is a participant in the general organic enterprise, and the success of that enterprise is a rough and probable index of the success of the intellect. But the intellect has its own peculiar work to do, and it may do that work well or ill. Even though it does it well the life as a whole may fail owing to the failure of some other auxiliary function. In that case we may properly say of the intellect, "*That organ was not at fault. It did what was required of it.*" There is, in short, a distinctively intellectual success or failure, which is to be judged in its own proper terms, which is to be found in the state or activity of the intellect itself, and in its relation to the field and materials in which it operates.

But just as a specific organic function has its own peculiar standard and conditions of success and failure, so it may have and usually does have its own immediately inciting interest. Much of the success of pragmatism has been due to its very properly insisting that thinking is a kind of action, that it is impelled by motives and warmed by passions, like any other kind of action. But in its eagerness to insist on the organic status of the intellect, this theory has strangely neglected the originality and in-

dependence of these motives and passions. The term "instrumentalism," which has largely superseded the broader term "pragmatism," emphasizes the subordination of the intellect to ends beyond itself. But the organic analogy does in fact point to quite a different conclusion. Most organic functions are interested in their own behalf. I may even breathe for the sake of breathing. I may identify my soul with my lungs. I may form a cult of "United Breathers" or "Air Worshipers," and count as the supreme moments of my life those which I pass in profound and reverent respiration. Or consider the predatory instinct. This evidently has its place in the economy of life by virtue of providing food for carnivorous animals; but hunting is also an art and a pastime, which many have thought worth cultivating as an end in itself.

What is true of respiration and huntsmanship can scarcely be denied of an activity so developed, so varied, so self-conscious, as that of the intellect. Nor in this case any more than the others, does the subordinate rôle contradict the autonomous rôle. The devotee of breathing or of hunting need not cease to breathe or hunt for vital purposes; nor need the intellectualist, the scientist, the speculative philosopher, because he has cultivated the art of knowing for its own sake, therefore cease to use his mind for the conduct of affairs.

Such being the general thesis for which I contend, I wish now to set forth some of the peculiar and independent interests of the intellect, some of the autonomous activities in which it may discipline and perfect itself, and which will constitute its own unique contribution to life. I should like to distinguish five interests that seem to me to be capable of being independently sustained and that give rise to activities which may be disciplined and controlled by a methodical technique.

1. *Curiosity* is the empirical interest in particular facts, or the logical interest in implicative facts. Both interests

are explorative in character, tending to the expanding of the field of experience from a given center of attention. There is an impulse to look round the corner, or into the inside of what is perceived externally, or on the other side of this side. This is an impulse that drives men on travels and voyages of discovery for the sake of seeing things "first hand." These interests may be highly refined, and express themselves in systematic observation, microscopy, telescopy, analysis, and the pursuit of trains of implication to their conclusion.

2. *Systematic Thought* has its own independent motive, the interest in trying novel combinations of ideas, in building systems of supposition and conjecture. It is the impulse of intellectual inventiveness. This is the chief sustaining interest in the solution of theoretical problems, that is, in contriving combinations of ideas that shall exhibit certain formal characters, such as consistency and simplicity. It is important to note that thinking is never free in the sense of being lawless or without control. Even the most speculative thinking must "mean something," and possess a structure or coherence that is borrowed from the more fundamental relations of logic. The interest in systematic thought is the interest in creating new applications of fundamental structural principles, or in introducing systematic structure into a given subject-matter. So powerful is this interest that it has driven pedants to strange excesses. Students of philosophy will remember the awful effect upon the later Stoics and others of the paradox of the liar. *If you say truly that you are telling a lie, are you lying or telling the truth?* Chrysippus is reputed to have written five books on such "Inexplicables," six books on the Liar itself, a book against those who professed to solve the Liar by a process of division, three books on the solution of the Liar, and a polemic against those who asserted that the Liar had false premises! It is a wonder that Chrysippus did not die of it, like Philetas of Cos,

whose fate is recorded in his epitaph (as translated by Stock):

“Philetas of Cos am I;
’T was the Liar made me die,
And the bad nights caused thereby.”

3. *Verification* has its own sustaining interest, that, namely, which is felt in the case of fulfilled anticipation. The hypothesis is a determinate expectation, a motor set, which may or may not fit the situation to which it points. It is satisfied when one can say, “I told you so,” “It is as I thought,” “It is as it ought to be.” This is the interest in *truth*; truth being the value which attaches to a hypothesis or idea in so far as it fits the environment. The technique of induction is the technique of contriving such determinate expectations as can bear the ordeal of empirical fact.

These three are the intellectual interests proper. They are the *cognitive* or *objective* intellectual interests, interests which submit to control beyond the mind. They signify interest in that which is independent of and external to the interested mind; they move the mind to adapt itself to its environment rather than the environment to itself; they incline the mind to surrender and conform itself to the facts and necessities of being. With these are to be contrasted two pseudo-intellectual interests, which act as auxiliary incentives but which are indifferent and possibly opposed to the cognitive motive of the first three.

4. *Taste*, in the intellectual sense, is the love of the exercise of the cognitive faculties for its own sake and in ways that are congenial. It leads to a selective rather than an explorative sensuous experience, to a neglect of what is not sensuously agreeable, and to a prolongation of what is agreeable. It is especially likely to control the play of ideas and imagery, which are freer and more flexible than perception. There is, for example, a taste for unity, system,

and harmony. But this is not invariable, as is proved by James's relish for a world which he described in Blood's words as "wild, game-flavored as a hawk's wing, never an instant true, ever not quite." Taste may conflict with the interest in truth, as in the case of the ancients' bias for the circle as applied to the motions of celestial bodies.

5. *Belief* is an interest in confident anticipation, in having things settled. This value also is independent of truth in the stricter sense, as is seen in the desire to find a refuge in faith. There is an interest in beliefs that are congruent with desires, that fit other beliefs or the general trend of aspiration, even when such beliefs are contrary to evident fact.

Governed by one or more of these motives, it is possible to lead an intellectual or pseudo-intellectual life. It is possible to be preëminently, artfully, and methodically an explorer of facts, a speculative thinker, an experimental scientist, a devotee of culture, or a man of faith. One may be a specialist, an expert in any of these vocations, and with no thought of the extent to which his attainment ministers to his material success, his length of life, or to the well-being of society. Meanwhile, the usefulness of the intellect is not contradicted by such specialization, any more than the usefulness of bodily strength and skill is contradicted by the cults of athletics or craftsmanship.

It should be noted that the usefulness of the first three of these attainments is very different from that of the last two. The former or cognitive type of attainment contributes to adaptation and control; the latter, or subjective type contributes to inward satisfactions and volitional energies that must remain precarious and transient, in so far as they take no account of the external forces which condition both survival and achievement. In so far as philosophy, like science, professes an interest in knowledge, it owes its first allegiance to the former or objective interests of the intellect; and should subordinate taste and

credulity to curiosity, logical rigor, and the decrees of experimental evidence. This, however, philosophy has rarely been permitted to do. The demand for religious apologetics has been so strong, and doubtless will always be so strong, as to stimulate the production of the desired commodity. This demand is what the economists call an effective demand. It can offer sufficient inducements, in the shape of popular applause and influence. I do not mean to charge philosophers with any conscious apostasy to truth. But their atmosphere and tradition, and the established standards of judgment incline them by professional custom to seek a hopeful and edifying view of things.

Often it is less the philosopher who is at fault than his readers and hearers, who allow their hopes to color the teachings of the master, and make him in spite of himself the sponsor of some gospel of which he may never even have heard. M. Bergson is notoriously a victim of this doubtful flattery; so much so that he has even been accused of catering to it. Thus Remy de Gourmont wrote as follows in the *Mercur de France* in 1910, apropos of the death of William James:

"I believe that all philosophy that is not purely scientific (negative, that is, to metaphysics), comes at the end of the reckoning to reinforce Christianity under whatever form it dominates the various nations. Most persons who fancy themselves interested in what they call the great problems are moved by self-interested egotistical anxiety. They think of themselves and of their destiny; they hope to find by rational means a solution agreeable to their desires, which secretly conform to the earliest teachings they received. Now since all metaphysical movements are very obscure, or at least difficult of access to most minds, when these movements are confronted with religious beliefs the beliefs are found to be of the same order but clearer, having been known in the past. This phenomenon was exhibited at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The deism of J. J. Rousseau, which seemed so remote from Catholicism, made ready the ground for a renovation of Catholicism. Chateaubriand, thoroughly impregnated with Rousseau, was the first of this description. . . . William James, whose religiousness is indifferent to religious forms, has, without

knowing it, wrought in the same way for the sects. M. Bergson's spiral spirituality, with its scientific but treacherous charm, achieves the same result. The metaphysical clouds it eloquently stirs dissolve in a religious rain, and this rain, as it dries, leaves a sort of manna upon which belief is fed. There are more priests than intelligent free-thinkers at M. Bergson's lectures. The manner of postulating free will in a Catholic country like France takes on an apologetic value. The most illustrious of our metaphysicians must know very well what he is doing."

The aspersion with which this paragraph closes is unjust. But the philosophical masters as a group are nevertheless not wholly guiltless of the apologetic uses to which their work is applied. They have been too much addicted to the use of ambiguities, and to the use of vague terms of eulogy borrowed from the vocabulary in which plain men express their deeper yearnings and hopes. When philosophers write of Spirit and Freedom and God and Eternity, even though, as is usually the case, they employ these terms in peculiar and technical senses of their own, the plain man is scarcely to be blamed if he feels his yearnings and hopes to be confirmed. Indeed the ambiguity of philosophical terminology, a peculiar flabbiness of ideas which renders them incapable of sharply contradicting or excluding anything, and an excessive craving for comprehensiveness and reconciliation, have made it possible for protagonists of quite opposite doctrines to weave the same philosophy into their arguments.

Another French writer, M. Le Dantec, has commented on this last "remarkable property," not without a touch of satire. He says, virtually, that everybody gets out of metaphysics what he puts into it:

"If the speech of metaphysicians, like that of creative artists, is addressed to a restricted public composed solely of their personal 'resonators,' it possesses yet another property which renders it superior to the eminently impersonal language of mathematicians. This remarkable property is that those who perceive it, those who vibrate in harmony with the metaphysician or the artist, are not ordinarily

in accord upon what they understand. They are agreeably affected, and this is their only common ground; but that does not prevent their keeping their first attitude as to other matters, and notably towards religious and social questions. A Catholic and an anarchist who at the same time hear the Symphony in C minor, feel at the same time emotions probably different, and remain the one an anarchist, the other a Catholic, as before. I imagine they do not fancy that in his work Beethoven expressed precisely their religious or social belief; while, when they commune together in Bergson or in James, each of them recognizes the expression of his own thought in the work of these subtle artists; and both draw from the reading of metaphysical productions new reasons for their being — the one more an anarchist, the other more a Catholic than in the past."

Another cause which operates to compromise the intellect, a cause which is undoubtedly operating today, is just plain weariness. If we trace the history of modern thought, we find that one of its striking characteristics is the rejection of axioms. In the past, whenever any prop of faith was removed, the mind leaned more heavily than ever on the props that remained. Especially notable were the tendency in the eighteenth century to count upon the immutable truths of morality after the challenging of ecclesiastical and political authority; and the tendency in the nineteenth century to move the superstructure of belief from the crumbling foundations of religious metaphysics, such as the "cogito, ergo sum" and the proofs of theism, to the supposedly unshakable foundations of mathematics, such as the axioms of Euclid, or that last straw of the drowning mind, "Two plus two equals four." The critical intellect has now invaded every holy place, and spread a disquieting doubt through all the corridors of life. Doubt is a healthy and invigorating atmosphere for a hardy mind; but it is very tiring. The mind craves a place to sit down. It carries its idols about but cannot find any pedestal to support them. It suffers from homesickness, vertigo, and an unquenchable longing for stability and rest. It is little wonder that in such a time the churches

are recruited by those who are willing to shut their eyes if only they can be made to feel *sure* of something again. "It is sad to think," says Sir James Stephen, "how much theology in our days, whether Protestant or Popish, holds out to its disciples this great inducement: Come to me, all ye that are weary of doubt, and I will give you security that, if your creed is false, you shall be the last to discover it."

I would not be uncompromising in this matter. It is as possible to be fanatical on the subject of the intellect as on any other subject. I wish merely to point out that much of the distrust from which the intellectual activities suffer is not owing to their being futile or misapplied but to a circumstance that may discredit any good thing, namely, its difficulty. Thinking is not only, as Adam Bede said, "mighty puzzling work," a strain upon human strength and patience, but it is of all forms of work the most lonely. People act and feel and even believe, in mobs. There is (Professor Cooley to the contrary notwithstanding) no first person plural to the verb "*cogito*." Observation, verification, and inference are functions which are perfected only in their independent individual exercise. I am not unmindful of the importance of the corroboration of one mind by another; but such corroboration is valuable only in so far as both minds have reached their results alone. Corroboration implies the absence of collusion. The devotee of the intellect must, then, have the strength to work alone, to see things for himself, to stand against the currents of opinion and the winds of passion. He cannot hope to win applause by the easy method of agreeing with others, but only by the more difficult method of bringing others to agree with him. And even then he cannot allow himself to mistake his following for confirmation of his beliefs, but must be ready to desert his converts if and in so far as fresh evidence inclines his judgment to another view. He is as unlikely, then, to be a leader, as he

is incapable of being a follower. For such non-conformists society must make a place. I have little interest in the "conscientious objector"; but I have the greatest regard for the *individual thinker*. The former opposes private conviction to public policy. His inflexibility is symptomatic of will and emotion, rather than enlightenment. The latter opposes freedom of thought to uniformity of opinion. Though he may impede collective action and have in emergencies even to be forcibly suppressed, nevertheless he is the servant of mankind. Standing on his watch-tower and recording what he sees, he does, even though it be unconsciously, succor the community to which he belongs.

I should not thus have apostrophized the devotee of the intellect had I not believed that society needs him, and needs him as never before. The great problems of the present are in fact *problems*. We all want enduring peace and we all want social justice; but we need to be *shown the way*. The great difficulties are difficulties of complexity. Human interests, man to man and nation to nation, are now interrelated and interdependent, extensively and intensively, in a measure entirely unparalleled in the past history of the world. Intellect is the only means by which their tragic conflict may be removed. There seems to be a widespread belief that all we need in order to avoid war and class struggle is a little horse-sense. We shall, however, be fortunate if the cerebrum of some future superman is equal to coping with these problems. They are *the* problems, magnificently, terrifyingly difficult. Therein lies what is hopeful and stirring in the situation. If we fail, we shall have dared the utmost; if we succeed, we shall have won the greatest of all victories in the struggle of man against the death from which he sprang and which circles him about.

If we value what the intellect can do, then we should value the intellect. We all want to live and to prosper in

peace. For these ends intellect is one of the things needful, if not the one thing needful. It does not follow, however, that we should live with the intellect, or practice a trade or profession with it, any more than that we should breathe with it or eat with it. My suggestion is that we should *think* with it, and then use the results as we will. In some measure the intellect must be allowed to lead its own life and perfect itself in its own way if we are to have its indispensable fruits most abundantly. In so far as it is the lot of the intellect to serve, it must be as a trusted and self-respecting servant. As the counselor of the will, it is dangerous if constrained to flatter the will's hopes or to do its bidding, but a mighty ally if taught to speak its mind honestly and fearlessly.